New Towns Summit
Tuesday 13th May 2014, Letchworth Garden City

Attendees:
Alexa Williams (Redditch BC), Bev Hindle (Bracknell Forest BC), David Hackforth (Milton Keynes Council), Dianne Cooper (Harlow Council), James Doe (Dacorum BC which includes Hemel Hempstead), Jim Daley (Peterborough BC), John Pi (Stevenage BC), Lisa Hughes (Welwyn Hatfield BC), Mike Vout (Telford & Wrekin Council), Sandra Taylor (North Ayrshire Council which includes Irvine).

Kelvin MacDonald (Senior Visiting Fellow at the Department of Land Economy at Cambridge University) chaired the event and there was additional input from David Ames from the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, David Lock CBE, Fi Godfrey-Fausset from the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, and Miles Gibson, Prize Director for the Wolfson Economics Prize.

In welcoming all Kelvin referred back to the Reith Committee established by Government in 1945 with these terms of reference:

'To consider the general questions of the establishment, development, organisation and administration that will arise in the promotion of New Towns in furtherance of a policy of planned decentralisation from congested urban areas; and in accordance therewith to suggest guiding principles on which such Towns should be established and developed as self-contained and balanced communities for work and living.'

The Committee itself conceived its task as "to conduct an essay in civilisation, by seizing an opportunity to design, evolve and carry into execution for the benefit of coming generations the means for a happy and gracious way of life."

The New Towns Act 1946 provided the Government with the power to acquire land within defined, designated areas and to build New Towns.

Springboard for the Future - David Lock CBE
To the above David added reference to the expanded towns achieved through the Town Development Act 1952, parts of which are still available, which was "An Act to encourage town development in county districts for the relief of congestion or over-population elsewhere, and for related purposes...".

David identified these factors from the experience of New Towns & expanded towns as keys to success:

1. Large-scale mixed use developments – more than the private sector alone can cope with
2. Multi-faceted
3. Public Corporation driven, accountable to Government
4. Land acquired at existing use value
5. Large-scale funding with time allowed for repayment (New Town development was repaid at 2% above LIBOR over just 15 years)
6. Annual budgetary control – NOT individual project control
7. Key stakeholders, especially the local authorities, as partners
8. Gathering population to be engaged for developing phases
9. Long-term stewardship
10. Citizenship to be cultivated
11. Towns must have a stop.

He identified these as obstacles to future initiatives:
1. Ignorance about need for new homes
2. Political fear – short-term horizons
3. No bigger picture or longer view
4. Land assembly – value expectations are not existing use
5. Land value capture (helps fund infrastructure)
6. Funding limits private sector capabilities
7. Development teams – MK spent 0.25m on marketing alone
8. Co-ordination of supporting investment – only 14% of total costs passed through MK Development Corporation.

At Ebbsfleet in particular:
1. Too complex for private sector
2. Land values already negative
3. Land owners not used to housing development

How resilient can Masterplans be?

Telford

Mike characterised the town as:
- “now growing up, beyond its teenage years”
- Since the original Madin Plan drivers have changed, same goals, new language
- Undergoing large-scale reinvestment, now a mixture of public & private
- Re-establishing the original population target – thus far not realised – of 200,000+
- Town has worked well as a platform for Midlands growth – town ‘hits above its weight’
- Landscape legacy is especially prized – evident concern about developing urbanity
- Sustained mix of urban & rural
- Capacity & space for growth were part of the Plan and still exist
- Good cross-town connections – but remain predominantly car-based though this is now being addressed
- Financially attractive for housing and employers
- Great care exercised with all new developments to sustain reputation.

Milton Keynes

David noted
- Garden City credentials
- Masterplan never a rigid blueprint but instead...
  o A strategic framework
  o Principles expressed cartographically
  o Updating by a series of strategic plans
  o Central area uses have expanded
  o First Local Plan in 1995 built on initial principles
- Green infrastructure has been critical to success
  o ‘soul’ is greenspace
  o Attenuation of flooding
  o Parks & water management provide recreation
  o Parks Trust sustained with dowry
- Amongst the top 2 fastest growing places in England
  o Population at designation 60,000, target 300,000
  o Increase of 20% pa over 14 years
- Expansion areas cope with ‘enhancements’
- Travel demand increased by 60% – practical remaining growth capacity of 25% but with new carbon reduction commitment
- New MK ‘smart’ commitments:
Centre of excellence
Led by Open University + partners with £16m
Digitally enabled centre for growth
Smart Cities Institute
Sensor & data networks
On demand & autonomous vehicle transport

- Sustaining flexible, whole-system approach
  - Smart city/innovation at heart
  - Organic process of development

To expand or not to expand – the Harlow dilemma
Dianne noted:

- Harlow designated 25/3/1947 with:
  - Tight boundary against Epping Forest & East Herts
  - Gibberd masterplan for semi-circular development planned within the landscape
  - Building on high ground with landscaped lower ground – green wedges (consequently no flooding issues)
  - Neighbourhood plans based on walking distances and hierarchy of centres
  - Created sustainable master plan, based on Garden City principles

- Target population of 80,000 achieved in 1960s since when
  - Population declined and only regained 80,000 in 2012
  - Reductions threatened quality and ‘regional centre’ status
  - 1974 plan for expansion up to 135,000 – extended the half circle to W, S & E and to N to complete the half of the circle – failed due to a change in government policy and lack of funding
  - Raising densities in redevelopments whilst accommodating higher levels of car ownership problematic as originally parking provision was limited.

- A NLP study suggested the following growth hierarchy:
  - 8,000 needed to meet housing needs
  - 11,000 needed to bring jobs back
  - 15,000 needed to promote regeneration/retail status
  - 20,000 needed to ‘transform’ town and town centre
  - 40,000 needed to sustain a public transit system

- Current prospect:
  - 1970’s expansion areas being reconsidered to W, S, E and N, as potential Garden City extensions
  - Current Local Plan consultation proposing an additional 15,000 houses to meet housing need although higher population requirement has been identified to sustain infrastructure

Small towns, big futures – Bracknell
Bev noted:

- Promoted at one time as “cheap & cheerful”!
- Transition from Development Corporation caused resentment
- ‘Legacy’ not generally positive – many prefer to say they live in ‘West Ascot’
- Failing infrastructure needing investment
- More positively:
  - Great location
  - Compact
  - Strong family home emphasis
  - Good transport links
Low unemployment
- Plentiful greenspace

- Quality town centre lacking and this affects pride in the town
  - Masterplanned, based again on streets
  - £180m
  - 300+ residential units incorporated

- Original framework is still being built on:
  - Incorporating cycleways
  - Selling off some sites to grow
  - Parishes to the north can accommodate growth
  - Benefits from the original ‘good planning’ recognised

- Not so positive:
  - Urban fringe issues
  - Growth not sustained – down to 3%
  - Sub-regional perspective: lots of competition

Town Centres – how to regenerate?

**Hemel Hempstead**

- Plans to grow by 10,000 to 100,000 over 20 years
- 2nd regeneration of the central area
- Problem of simultaneous obsolescence – scale of reinvestment
- Political need to show progress – requires flexibility
- 10% of new housing within the central area – incentive for private investors
- Organic masterplan – linear centre along valley floor:
  - 7 character zones, regeneration needs led
  - Old town – public realm important
  - Civic zone – private sector partner for residential & leisure
  - Jellico Water Gardens – heritage project
  - Hospital zone – HCA land ownership
  - Marlowes:
    - Central events square to build on footfall
    - Replace ‘dour urban’ feel – tree lined
    - Pedestrian realm
    - Lighting scheme – for night-time economy
    - Overall management scheme with business plan
  - Bank Court – public piazza
  - ‘Play on the way’ – distributed play provision

- ‘Hemel Evolution’
  - Flexibility within overall vision
  - Marshalling owners, public sector especially
  - Risk attentive

**Irvine**

Sandra noted:

- 1959 overspill agreement with Glasgow (following closure of Royal Ordinance Factory)
- 1966 designation with planned population of 120,000
- Currently 55,000 population in a two-centred town (straddling river crossing)
- Perception of being:
  - ‘Jaded’
  - Without sustainable employment
  - Without a clear & specific role in N Ayrshire
Transport disconnect – loss of traditional shops

- Addressed by:
  - URC Town Plan
  - Centralising of businesses into 2 blocks
  - Engagement with businesses and transport
  - Major projects with finance
    - 2012: 3 Enterprise Areas
    - 2013 Irvine Vision
    - 2014 Completions!
  - N Ayrshire hub town, reconnecting the parts
  - Town Centre Manager

The role of education – New Earswick

- Primary & secondary schooling integral to the design and setting up of new settlement
- JRHT nominate Governors to schools
- Befriending & visiting to and from schools
- Folk Hall:
  - Community hub
  - Entertainment & learning
  - Nursery (from the start)
  - Added swimming pool
  - Library pre 1920
- Refreshed vision – “renaissance”
  - New Residential Home directly integrated with Folk Hall facilities
  - Home helping to free up family houses
- Estimate that it takes 150yrs for establishing population to ‘normalise’ into a multi-generational structure
- Community development work valued – potential for ‘3rd way’ (not LA or private) via public interest companies?

Back to the future – fulfilling the exemplar role

Redditch: celebrating 50 years

Alexa noted:

- Legacy of:
  - Tight boundary
  - Local population (30,000) who felt they were “being done to”.
  - Overspill population from Birmingham
  - Significant, protected open space
  - Bus served district centres (these are now oversized)
  - Roads well able to accommodate growth
  - Walkways
  - Twice redeveloped town centre

- Future:
  - Looking to neighbours (Stratford & Bromsgrove, latter with whom some services are shared) not to green belt gap from Birmingham
  - New ‘Pledge’ for next 50 years
  - Planned increase from 84,000 (2011) to 93,000 as per draft Local Plan.

The next big ideas?
Miles outlined progress toward the award of the Wolfson Economics Prize 2014; the prize will be awarded to the entrant who offers the best answer to the question “How would you deliver a new Garden City which is visionary, economically viable, and popular?”

- 279 entries
- Finalists announced 4th June
- Prize awarded September after further selection round
- Applicants have addressed in support of their entries:
  - **Visionary**
    - Location
    - Built form
    - Role of ‘garden’
    - Role of City
    - Devolution of powers
    - Sustainability
    - Energy – local sourcing
    - Transport – connectivity
    - Self-build
    - Home design
    - Design codes
    - Neighbourhood planning
  - **Economically viable – with suitable governance**
    - Rationale
    - Self-financing means
    - Government role
    - Tenure/land ownership
    - Critique of planning
    - Delivery vehicles
    - Investor & shareholder appetite
    - Banking & local money
    - Representation for population-to-be
  - **Popular**
    - Design as popular – consumer focus
    - Take engagement seriously
    - Capture what’s good
    - Use passage of time benefits – start with the garden
    - Long-term incentives – emotional investment
    - Be generous with compensation.
  - **Deliver**
    - National debate
    - Strategy or criteria to lead debate on location
    - Don’t compromise on quality
    - Project plan with decision gates
    - Cross-party agreement

- Lessons to be shared with:
  - Lyons commission
  - Civil Service
  - Other interested organisations.

- Fellow attendees suggested that submissions should address:
  - Futureproofing
    - Stewardship
    - Endowment income
- Skills – regain confidence
- Holistic approach
- Good design & healthy community
- Non-sectoral approach
- Special/individual approach